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This conference on food and hunger is both timely and appropriate.

And this location -- at the center of North America's vast food-producing region -- is particularly appropriate.

For it is here -- on the plains and in our Corn Belt -- where we have planted the seeds which can grow into a lasting solution to the ageless problem of hunger.

The spectres of starvation and malnutrition have stalked the world since the beginning of time.

In this, the last quarter of the 20th Century, it defies all logic that millions of people in America are underfed and malnourished.

With all our abundance and technology, it defies all logic that half a billion people throughout the world live on the razor's edge of existence.

But logical or not, the problem is real -- it is pervasive -- and it is inexcusable.

It is of little use to talk about solving the problems of hunger in the world unless we look first at ourselves.

So let me address myself first to our immediate domestic problems.

Remarks by Secretary of Agriculture Bob Bergland before the Governor's Conference on Food and Hunger, Lincoln, Nebraska, Friday, November 11, 1977.

Any national food policy -- any basic nutrition policy -- any world food policy -- is not worth talking about -- and not even possible to implement -- if they are not rooted firmly in a sound agricultural policy.

It is sheer folly to talk about delivering good and nutritious food to American consumers and sharing our abundance with the rest of the world -- if American farmers do not have the economic ability to produce that food -- and produce it in abundance.

It is on the land -- and on our farms -- that any national and international food system has its origin.

A bankrupt agriculture means a bankrupt nation in more ways than one.

If American consumers expect to get a constant supply of food -- and if we continue to expect our food exports to keep bailing our nation out to pay for imported oil -- and if we expect to use our food abundance as an instrument to create world cooperation and peace -- then the people and the nation must share the responsibility to maintain a viable and productive agriculture. It is as simple as that.

That is what farmers must have -- that is what this Administration wants them to have -- and that is what the nation must provide.

That is the heart of this Administration's farm policy.

In the first ten short months of this Administration we have made a good and positive start in this direction.

Many farmers and others will disagree with that -- but I say, give our new Food and Agriculture Act a chance to do its job. Give this Administration the opportunity to use the full potential of these programs in behalf of farmers.

After all, it was not until this fall that farmers planted their first crop under this Administration's farm programs.

We were left a legacy of problems in agriculture -- due in part to the absence of any real farm program during the previous five years.

We inherited a surplus of massive proportions, brought about by three successive years of record grain production and favorable worldwide weather and production conditions.

We inherited the harvest of fence-to-fence production.

Weather knows no politics -- no party lines -- and is impervious to any Administration's policy decisions.

Farm prices are neither made in heaven nor in Washington -- they are made in the market place.

Nor are farm prices and income made by glowing promises.

No farm policy can control the weather and crop conditions. No farm policy can or should guarantee food producers a profit. I say this for very good reason.

In the first place, Congress wouldn't and can't pass such legislation for simple political and economic reasons.

Second, a full parity price and income support program for farmers would require absolute and total regulation of farm operations. Farmers would lose all decision-making authority.

Third, and finally, such a profit-guaranteed farm program would -- in the end -- benefit only the largest of farm operators. We have already had too much of this in previous farm programs where the rich get richer, the big get bigger and the small family operator falls farther and farther behind. In addition, a profit-guaranteed program would drive farm land prices to even more unrealistic levels -- further hastening the take-over of farms by speculative and big investor interests.

When farmers start to think about the full implication of such a program -- loss of decision-making -- greatly inflated land prices -- the ultimate elimination of the family farm system of agriculture as we now know it -- they will see the wisdom of using the new food and agriculture act which the Congress and the Administration have put together.

The new food and farm act does give farmers reasonable price protection -- it does provide for a commodity loan program that will give farmers new muscle in the market place and establish a farmer-owned and farmer-controlled grain reserve. It does give us new tools to expand our farm export programs and keep us competitive on the world market. It will, in the end, tend to smooth out the violent farm price fluctuations which are disastrous to the farmers and cause nothing but resentment among consumers.

But best of all -- and the one reason why I am so optimistic about the worth of the new food and farm act -- is that it has the support of a vast majority of American people.

That is unprecedented in the history of farm programs.

For the first time in history -- or at least in my memory -- the American people recognize the vital role that farmers contribute to our national well-being and security.

For the first time, you have American people wholeheartedly backing farmers in their efforts to produce an abundance of food. They want to see the family farmer survive and prosper.

And so does this Administration.

And we're going to see to it that they do. With the support of the nation we're going to stick with the family farmer through this difficult period of change.

And this is a period of change -- drastic change. Today's American agriculture is not like yesterday's. Farmers and the production of food have assumed a new importance and a new stature in our economy. Our food abundance has assumed a new dimension in the international arena.

Old farm programs -- old concepts -- old food and farm policies -- are no longer relevant to the changing role of agriculture.

This Administration has the courage and the determination to bring agriculture and its policies into the 1980's. This Administration is not taking the easy way out with promises it cannot keep -- nor with policies that do not work.

We're confident that with the support of the American people we will put the American system of farm family agriculture on an equal economic footing with the rest of the economy. To the extent possible, we can lessen the risks and uncertainties inherent in agriculture -- protect the independence and decision-making rights of individual farmers -- assure them reasonable and acceptable price protection -- and stabilize the agricultural economy generally.

We are determined that we achieve these objectives for our farmers.

With this brief introduction to our basic food problem -- I would now like to turn to the theme and purpose of this conference -- that of food and hunger.

First, I would like to address myself to our domestic food programs -- their strengths and their weaknesses and how we plan to improve them.

Traditionally, this nation has relied on a policy of charity to feed our hungry.

At best, charity is a noble gesture. It relieves our individual conscience and it does some good for a few. But charity is a sometime thing.

During the Great Depression, we experimented with a food stamp program which was halted by World War II. Still later, after the war, we enacted and expanded various food distribution and school lunch programs.

These programs were better. At least, we were, at last, working to develop a national policy and system of feeding the needy.

But there were and still are serious weaknesses in these programs.

For the most part, they are fragmented programs. They are not based on sound nutrition principles. And, sad to say, they were motivated in the beginning -- not so much to feed people -- but to get rid of food surpluses.

And that's no way to run a food program.

Then in the sixties, we revived the food stamp program. This program grew from a pilot basis serving a few thousand people in its first year to over 16 million people in 1976.

Basically, it is a good program. But as it grew, it was permitted to fall victim to unnecessary red tape, sloppy administration which invited some abuse, and because of unnecessary cash requirements, it foreclosed the program to many of the most needy.

After these years of benign neglect, the food stamp and other food programs cried for reform and improvement.

When we took office in January of this year, we made this our first order of business.

The new Food and Agriculture Act of 1977 corrects many of the abuses and limitations of the food stamp program.

It eliminates the purchase requirements to get food stamps -- which will add another three to four million of the most needy people to the program.

It simplifies the eligibility requirements, thus reducing much red tape and administrative costs.

It furnishes 75 percent of the cost-sharing administrative expenses for fraud investigation.

We intend to make further administrative improvements.

But even with these administrative and policy improvements, we are far from solving the nagging problem that has plagued all our food programs.

That problem is nutrition.

To be blunt about it -- even after 75 years of nutrition research -- we do not know much about the basic nutritional needs of people -- how it affects the physical, intellectual and emotional activities of people.

The National Academy of Science says that it is not unfair to state that -- at best -- the results of previous nutrition research is limited and fragmentary.

Frankly, we know more about feeding a hog for market than we do about feeding people.

Obviously, we need to know more. It is impossible to embark on a national food policy or talk about a global food program -- unless we have a sound nutritional policy.

From here on out, this Administration is going to do just that.

We are going to focus and expand our nutrition research to determine the real, basic nutritional needs of people.

* We need to know more about why people choose one food over another, then we must develop and test methods for food fortification, food distribution, and nutrition education.

* We need to identify the differences in nutritional requirements between men and women, for people of all ages, for people working under different job and stress conditions.

* We need to know more about the nutritional quality of the food we eat, and what production, processing, and handling does to the nutrient content of those foods.

* We need to know more about the dietary needs of developing countries and design programs that will meet their varying circumstances and requirements.

* And, finally, we need to find out the nutritional consequences of government policies in such areas as food production, processing, and distribution.

To coordinate all these quests for knowledge we are now creating within the USDA a Human Nutrition Research Service.

When we achieve these objectives and incorporate them into our own domestic food programs, then, in concert with other nations, we can move more confidently and effectively toward a workable global food policy.

In this area our record is relatively good. At least our intentions have been morally right.

General George Catlett Marshall -- the father of the Marshall plan -- expressed our national feelings 30 years ago when he said: "Our policy is not against any nation or doctrine -- but against hunger, poverty, desperation and chaos."

More recently at the University of Notre Dame, President Carter said: "It is a new world -- but America should not fear it. It is a new world -- and we should shape it."

In the same speech he also said: "We know a peaceful world cannot long exist one-third rich and two-thirds hungry."

I subscribe to this -- and so do you.

We must use food as an instrument of peace. It is folly to ask a hungry child in Asia or South America to bite a bullet he cannot eat.

As George Bernard Shaw once wrote: "You cannot talk brotherhood to a starving man."

But as we address ourselves to the problem of world hunger and a global food security program -- we are confronted with a challenge of gigantic magnitude.

Good moral grounds -- and good intentions are not enough.

It means we must deal with the skeptics and naysayers at home. It means we must deal with a fragmented world of diverse nations -- some rich, some poor -- some developed, some just emerging. We must deal with varied cultures and subcultures of which we know little.

We must deal in the jungle of international politics and the cold, hard economic realities of supply and price, of balance of payments, of trade barriers, protectionism, inflation, and the current worldwide energy crisis.

Just giving away our food is not the complete answer.

Nor will one broad international food policy solve all the problem -- because, at the heart of the problem, the major responsibility lies within each country itself. I would like to discuss this issue a little later.

But first, I think we should deal with some of the myths that surround the world food situation. As with all myths, they have in them some element of error that makes them dangerous.

There is the so-called "triage" myth. That's an old battlefield concept where you use your available limited resources to help those wounded who can respond to treatment. The others you leave to die. The people who promote the triage strategy in the world food arena contend that we should ignore those nations and those people who seemingly are beyond help.

This is an erroneous and inhuman concept. In my judgment, there are no countries that are beyond help. Even those in greatest difficulty can be assisted if the commitment is made.

Some years ago, there were people who wrote off India as a country beyond help. In the intervening decade India has increased its agricultural growth more rapidly than its population growth.

The second myth is the "protectionist" idea. Some commodity groups in this country are fearful that if the developing nations are assisted in improving their food production, they will increase their output to a level where they would compete with us in export markets. Therefore, there is real resistance in some quarters to extending technical assistance to the developing countries. This is patently false. In fact, the record shows the exact opposite is true -- our total exports increase.

The third myth is that unlimited generosity is the end-all and do-all answer to any nation's food problem. These people firmly believe that continuous, massive food assistance should be a permanent policy and that the recipient nation will be eternally grateful to us.

While a limited amount of food aid is undeniably helpful -- massive and continuous amounts can and do reduce the incentive of that nation to become more self-reliant. It can depress prices in the receiving countries and it can rob the recipient country of its autonomy in international affairs.

Then there is the myth that food can be power -- that food can be used as a weapon to exert authority and influence. An idea is prevalent in this country that the U.S. can use its so-called food power in the same sense that the OPEC nations have oil power. This is wrong -- morally wrong and economically impossible.

The use of American food abundance for such purposes is not in keeping with our traditional national policies. Instead, we see our agricultural capabilities as a means of increasing exports, earning foreign exchange, building interdependence with other countries in the interest of peace, assisting needy countries to get themselves over difficult circumstances, and facilitating the response of foreign governments to diplomatic initiatives in behalf of an enduring peace.

Then, finally, there is the myth expressed by the doomsdayers. Theirs is the voice of darkest pessimism. They claim that all is hopeless. They say that the forces of nature -- the immutable force of population growth -- the finiteness of land to meet future food needs worldwide indicate that nothing we can do will really matter in the long run.

These voices of doom are wrong -- dead wrong. The fact is, we are now using only half of the world's total available land resources to produce food. Population growth in many countries is slowing down. We have only just begun to tap the full potential of food technology. We are just beginning to learn some basic facts about nutrition. The whole new science of genetics can revolutionize our plant and animal production.

No, I do not accept this concept of doom -- I accept only the likelihood of success. And that is basic to our national policy.

I know from personal experience that nations -- if given the opportunity and the motivation -- can literally pull themselves up by the bootstraps in solving their own food problems.

When I visited the country of Malaysia last June, I found a most remarkable program underway -- under the general heading of land reform.

In Malaysia, they are taking some 500,000 dispossessed, very poor, landless tenants and, in some cases, just plain squatters who have been driven out of their homeland -- and returning them to the land.

Through a loan financed by the World Bank, the Malaysians have moved a half million people to new tracts of land where they have cleared the jungle.

Each of these families have about four hectares -- or about 10 to 11 acres -- where they are producing tropical crops.

These people are organized into communities and each of the small holders receives a share of stock in a cooperative which processes the rubber, the palm oil and other crops and sells it for them.

After 15 years, the families will have title to the land. They are paying off the money lent to them by the World Bank. It provides a new economic and social stability in this country. Communism doesn't stand a prayer of a chance. Soon they will be producing enough palm oil, copra, rubber and other crops so they can export them and in turn buy our grain and other farm commodities.

Of course, a sound land reform policy in all the poor and developing nations is necessary as the first step toward a semblance of food self-reliance.

In addition to a policy of sharing our abundance with these nations, we should lend technical assistance, encourage land reform, export some of our know-how and materials. That is the heart of a real global food policy.

There is no easy, quick or magic answer to the problem of hunger throughout the world.

It will require patience, cooperation, and perseverance on our part and all the other developed nations.

We must never forget that food is the basic right of all men -- everywhere.

Our food abundance must become a major component of the President's human rights policy worldwide.

It has been said that the worst sin toward our fellowman is not to hate them but to be indifferent to them -- that is the essence of inhumanity.

At all cost, we cannot afford the luxury of indifference to the plight of our world neighbors -- for at stake is world understanding and an enduring peace.

Thank you.

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